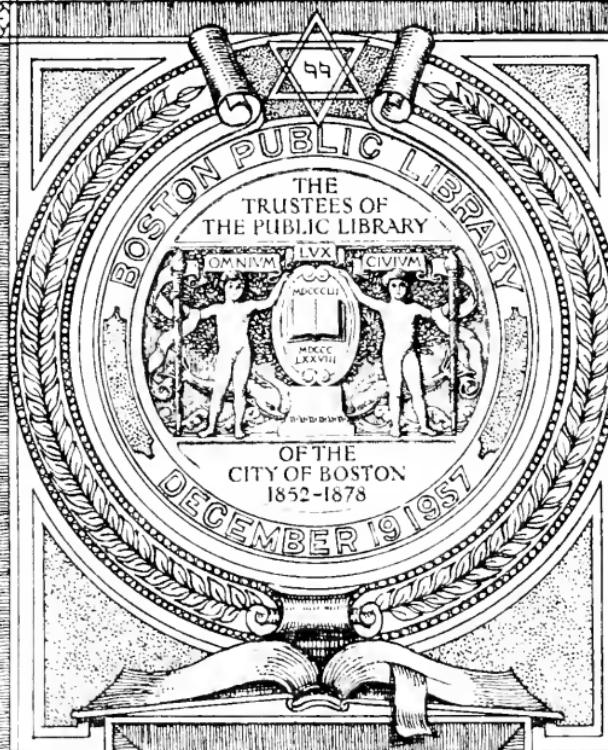


The Lady of Shunem

THE FANNY GOLDSTEIN
JUDAICA COLLECTION



GIFT OF
THE JACOB ZISKIND TRUST
FOR
CHARITABLE PURPOSES

THE LADY OF SHUNEM.

T H E

LADY OF SHUNEM.

BY

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157 IX

TO MY SISTER,

HARRIET MEURICOFFRE, AND HER HUSBAND,

I DEDICATE

THIS HUMBLE VOLUME

IN REMEMBRANCE OF MANY KINDNESSES

SHOWN BY THEM TO

ME AND MINE.

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER.						PAGE.
I.—INTRODUCTION ...	...	...	...	...	...	I
II.—THE LADY OF SHUNEM	...	...	...	...	...	9
III.—ABRAHAM AS A FATHER	...	...	...	...	...	37
IV.—THE BAR SINISTER ...	...	...	...	...	...	70
V.—THE GOD OF FAMILIES	...	...	...	...	...	93
VI.—EVERY GOOD AND EVERY PERFECT GIFT...	...	...	...	...	...	119

THE
LADY OF SHUNEM.

CHAPTER I.

THE words of this little book are addressed to Fathers and Mothers; more especially to Mothers.

In writing them, I have put far from me all considerations of originality or literary merit. My one aim is to try to express in words some of the lessons which God has been patiently teaching me during a tolerably long life, and to share with other parents the comfort which he has given to me, and the light which, from time to time, he has caused to fall, for me, on the

words of Scripture in relation to the deepest of human affections.

My little book is not didactic. I do not presume to give advice to parents as to the practical management of children, or training of youth. I have sometimes observed that such advice is futile ; for management and training must vary with the differences of character of those trained ; and the varieties of human character are as infinite as the varieties in the material creation. There is no uniformity in what comes from the Creator's hands. No two flowers are entirely alike, and no two human beings are entirely alike. I have felt that books of rules and counsels for the influencing and training of our children are, therefore, much like a uniform set of clothes, or list of articles of diet, which cannot fit or be adapted to all alike. At the same time, there are certain great and unchangeable principles which can never with impunity be neglected in the attitude of parents towards

their children. These principles must first be firmly rooted in the relation of the earthly parent to the Eternal Father of all, in order that they may become fruitful in the relation of the earthly parent to his or her own child. Readers who might expect some useful rules of practice laid down here will, therefore, be disappointed. My one thought bears on the attitude of the heart and soul of the parent towards God, of the relation of the father or the mother to the Great Father-Mother, God. I wish to try to show forth also, in some humble degree, the attitude of our God towards parents and towards families, and especially to remind mothers of what the Saviour is, what he has shown himself in the Scriptures to be, and what he ever will be, to *Mothers*.

For after all that we can do, or have done, for our children, after all our anxieties, carefulness, calculations, strained efforts of years, seed sown, and watched and watered, I think a time

comes to every Christian parent in which he or she feels driven to cease reckoning on all that has been done, or fretting over what has, unhappily, been left undone, over opportunities missed and mistakes made ; and to take the whole burden of that beloved soul, or family, with all the past, present, and future circumstances connected or likely to arise in connection with it, and cast it upon the Lord, to make over the task to him, who is the “Wonderful, the Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.”

With this surrender comes a greater calm ; not a cessation of spiritual endeavour and faithful intercession, but rather the beginning of a new life, of a new kind of faith, of a faith which claims and holds, of a sustained confidence which takes the place of many and complex thoughts and strivings. One supreme thought is substituted for the toil and working of heart and brain, and the minute following and noting of

the details of a soul's progress and development.

I may say, in passing, that while I address myself to fathers and mothers, I bear in mind, and my heart goes out in deepest sympathy to countless women, and many men also, who, though actually childless, are full of parental feeling, and are often indeed mothers and fathers to many. There are few women who have not something of the mother's heart, be they mothers or not. In a tenderly loving and motherly nature the very fact of never having had the joy of actual motherhood sometimes engenders a more generous and larger reach of sympathy towards all children, and towards grown persons also who are weak, helpless, dependent, and who need maternal handling and comfort. Women often act as true mothers towards their own brothers, sisters, and even aged parents, indeed, to any and all whose position or character calls for and brings into exercise the generous

and cherishing helpfulness of motherhood, that precious gift to a starved world. It is to the true mother I speak, who knows what spiritual travail is, even if she has never known natural travail.

On the other hand, there are actual mothers in the world—it is to be hoped they are very few—who seem to know little of the mother's heart ; and, indeed, some who are bereft of it. I do not speak of those wretched mothers who have been demoralized by life-long misery and want, or made desperate by cruel treatment, or hardened by drink and vice. I mean mothers who have not been subjected to any such influences, but who are by nature cold, selfish, or worldly ; and among these I have seen even Christian (or professing Christian) mothers, whose religion itself has failed to make them truly loving towards their children. There is something wanting in such persons which must have been wanting, left out, in the very first

make and build of the character ; and the want is a ghastly one. It is an unpleasant subject of contemplation. I pass on, and turn to those who are in any degree truly mothers, and, above all, to “earth’s tender and impassioned few” among these. They are of those the depth and extent of whose sufferings through all the ages are known only to God, but whose joy and reward, when the mother’s anguish has brought them to a more intimate knowledge of God and communion with Christ, is beyond the joy and reward of any other lover and seeker of souls. For Christ, and after him all the teachers, poets, and thinkers of the world, have used the travail and the joy of motherhood as the typical expression of all that is deepest and most terrible in spiritual anguish, and highest and purest in spiritual joy and fruition.

I have known many fathers, too, who have had the hearts of mothers, who have shown the long-suffering, patience, and enduring love of a

woman toward an erring child. We are all familiar with the touching portrait of such a father in Goldsmith's *Vicar of Wakefield*. As a minister of religion, he must needs judge severely his daughter's error, but the strong, tender, human love of the father and the Christian held on to the end, "believing all things, hoping all things," and "covering the multitude of sins." Thank God there are many fathers who can fathom and follow the mother's experience in all except natural child-bearing.

CHAPTER II.

THE LADY OF SHUNEM.

I HAVE long had a great admiration for her, (you will find her story in II. Kings, iv.). We may do well to make her nearer acquaintance, and see what she has to teach us.

She was a lady of rank, a landed proprietress it would seem. She was a shrewd observer, and a good judge of character. She had observed the bearing and conduct of Elisha. She was a hospitable woman, and earnestly pressed him to stay at her house for refreshment and rest, which he did "as often as he passed by." Convinced by further observation of his character—though he was but a poor man, turning in, footsore and hungry, from his pedestrian missions—that he was "a holy man of God," she

planned, with true womanly tact and kindness, that he should have a room of his own in her house, a permanent abode, to which he could freely come at all times. Her proposal to her husband, "Let us make a little chamber, I pray thee," points to the erection of a new wing, as we should say, to their house; this was "on the wall" of the town, so situated that the prophet could enter or leave by his own door, without contact with the family, if he so desired it. It was furnished with the simple necessaries of an itinerant prophet of primitive times. His servant also was accommodated, for Elisha said later, "Thou hast been careful for *us* with all this care."

In passing, we may notice her character as a wife, and the worthiness of her husband. Their relations to each other seem to have been of the best and most dignified. She appears to have been of an independent and self-reliant spirit; and he was wise and worthy of her,

granting her the initiative and freedom of judgment and action which her strong and dignified character entitled her to exercise. There was no assumption of superiority or show of masculine rule on the one hand, and no servility or weak dependence on the other. They were a couple worthy of admiration and imitation.

She had all she needed for outward temporal happiness ; her answer to Elisha showed this, when he sought to know what he could do for her to repay her for all her kindness. All she needed, except one thing. The woman's heart craved for the love of a child, and she had no child. Becoming aware of this, Elisha entreated God for her, and in course of time a child was born. After some years—we know the story—the boy went to his father in the field among the reapers, one hot day of harvest ; he cried out about the pain in his poor little head, and fell fainting from sunstroke. “ Carry him to his mother,” the father said, apparently confident

that, once in the care of that wise and loving mother, all would be well; so strong and resourceful to him was the word *mother*. It was needless for him, the father, to do more.

The beloved child died. Now note how the character of that mother comes out. She said not a word to anyone, but took the child and laid him on the bed of the man of God, and shut the door, locking out of sight the tender body of the child of her heart, and proceeded at once on the course of action on which from the first her heart had been set, and from which nothing should deter her, which nothing should delay. From the first her thoughts had turned to the Prophet, the minister and messenger of God, who was to her as the Saviour, the being through whom had been revealed to her the good-will and the wonder-working power of God.

The mystery and the apparent cruelty of this sudden sorrow smote upon her heart. The questioning perhaps arose, “Why has God

allowed this? Why is a happiness so freely granted so soon snatched from me again?" Her words to the prophet seem to betray that anguish of questioning, so well-known to the suddenly bereaved, which dares even to reproach the divine providence—" *Did I ask a son of thee?*" But in these first moments she was silent. There was no bitter outcry, such as the people of those times so freely gave way to, no weeping or wailing, apparently no outward agitation at all which would have been marked by attendants. A weaker woman would have claimed the immediate help and sympathy of others—of a husband at least—would have deemed it even unsuitable and, in appearance, unfeeling to leave the dead boy, and go forth with such coolness of determination to carry out the great absorbing design of her breaking heart.

She left the child, and went out and called to her husband to send one of the young men at

once, and one of the asses, that she might “run to the man of God and come back again.” Her husband asks in astonishment why this sudden resolve to-day ; “it is neither a new moon nor a Sabbath.” But he finds no fault ; he is accustomed to rely on her judgment, and not to criticize her actions. He accepts and is satisfied with her firm reply, though it is no explanation of her motive—“It is well,” or (in Hebrew) “Peace!”—it is all right.

We can imagine what that long ride was to her, in the burning sunshine of a harvest day in Palestine ; the cruel darts of Apollo, which had slain her darling, beating down upon her throbbing and troubled head, an anguish of sorrow and suspense at her heart, the tension of her sorely-tried faith never for a moment relaxed, as she rode on, mile after mile, not allowing the youth by her side to halt or slacken speed for an instant.

Elisha, perceiving her afar off, says in astonish-

ment to Gehazi, "There is the Shunemite," and bids him hasten to meet her, and ask after her welfare and that of her family. I do not imagine the approach of Gehazi was very welcome to her. Perhaps, with her womanly insight, she had discerned that the man was not wholly sincere, as was proved later by his deceitful conduct in regard to Naaman the Syrian. In any case, no presence except that of the "Master" was bearable to her then ; no word but his could satisfy her in her extreme need ; no lower minister or messenger of God than the inspired prophet could save her from despair. She pressed on.

But mark first her answer to Gehazi's question, "Is it well with thee ? Is it well with thy husband ? Is it well with the child ?" "*It is well*," she replies. "*It is well !*" And he was lying dead ! Brave, noble woman ! It is an inspired and courageous falsehood this which you have uttered. You shall be justified in

speaking that which to men would seem to be a lie. God, who “raiseth the dead, and calleth things which are not as though they were,” will himself justify this splendid invention of the mother’s broken heart and desperate faith. She also calls “things that are not as though they were.”

In other circumstances of a more commonplace nature, and in a calmer, more calculating mood, her words would have been false in regard to her child (for Gehazi enquired concerning the physical health of her and hers) ; but her faith made of them a sublime paradox, resting upon a basis of eternal truth. Faith dares both to deny and to affirm, where the denial and the affirmation are both alike unreasonable and unwarrantable in the judgment of the cold observer, who is untried in spirit, and may be a stranger to the heights and depths of maternal or even ordinary human experience.

O ! Mothers, dare to rise to this level of

faith. If once you have made, and are carrying out the resolution of the Lady of Shunem, in regard to any spiritual matter, determined that you will not pause nor slacken speed until you have clasped the feet of *your* prophet—the Saviour and Deliverer—then say fearlessly, “*It is well.*” Your declaration may not be spoken aloud to anyone; but speak it to your own heart, speak it before the great “cloud of witnesses” in the presence of God, the angels, saints, confessors, martyrs, prophets, just men made perfect, to whom—seeing far beyond what we see—such an affirmation coming from the trembling or broken heart of a mother is as a shout of victory.

When Daniel set himself, with full purpose of heart, to pray for his people and nation, he continued from dawn till sundown; and in the evening the angel-messenger, Gabriel, came to him, and said, “At the beginning of thy supplication, the commandment went forth, and I am

come to show thee, for thou art greatly beloved.” From the beginning, from the early morning, perhaps for a much longer time ; and now it was evening, and yet during all that day, and for many days, outwardly nothing was changed ; the people were in captivity still, and Zion, their dear home, as far off as ever. Yet the heavenly messenger told him that from the beginning his prayer was accepted. It may not *seem* to be well at all for those for whom you are praying. You may have left them *dead*—still dead spiritually—or they are sick, or in sore trouble, or imminent danger ; but if you have taken the direct path of the Shunemite, turning neither to the right hand nor to the left till you held the Saviour’s feet and looked into his face, then you have the *right* to say, “It is well.” And *it shall be well* ; for you “know whom you have believed,” and that he cannot deny himself—that he would sooner wreck the universe than fail to keep a promise to one of the least of those who trust in him.

Gehazi's question suggests to me a resemblance to certain enquiries which are sometimes too lightly made. Have you ever, perhaps, as I have, been startled and even hurt by a sudden question abruptly put concerning the spiritual position of one very dear to you ? "Is so-and-so converted ?" you may have been asked, about one whom you love, and for whose spiritual life you may feel yourself in a measure responsible. This kind of probing is frequently a habit of persons who know very little of inward heart labour and sorrow, and who may be almost strangers to the person questioned. The question of Gehazi was not put in an impertinent spirit, for it was the message of his Master to the Lady of Shunem ; but the kind of enquiry to which I allude, made by shallow or unthinking persons, servants of the Great Master though they may be, often brings a stab of pain, and provokes a feeling of resentment against interference with the secret things per-

taining to human life and love. Those who go about asking such questions are not wise, nor are they learned even in the rudiments of spiritual matters ; for the beginnings of life are silent and secret—for the most part unknown and unperceived. Where do such persons place the moment in the soul's history when it may be deemed proper to announce the new birth ? And are they sure that their reading of signs is always correct in the case of the wonderful evolution being brought about in a soul over which the Spirit of God is brooding, as at first over the dimly illumined and chaotic universe ?

The Lord Jesus said that when men should cry concerning the coming of his kingdom on earth, “Lo here ! and lo there !” His disciples were not to be deceived, nor go after these criers out ; for, said he, “The kingdom of God is *within you.*” Again he said, “The kingdom of God cometh not with observation,” and he likened the vitalizing power of his spirit to

leaven that a woman took and *hid* in three measures of meal. Every mother knows, by her own daily and hourly experience, during a given period, that the child yet unborn into the world is *alive*, long before its actual birth. The life, feeble and scarcely perceptible at first, increases daily in vigour, and this when as yet to human sight the child *is not*. His being is known to the mother alone. There is a lesson in this fact to those who will learn, which should rebuke our rashness in pronouncing on the spiritual state of some unborn yet living soul, some tender plant of God's planting which has not yet begun to be seen above the soil. The abrupt enquiry, "Is such an one converted or 'saved,'" has seemed to me, under some circumstances, as indelicate as the question would be, put to an expectant mother, "Is the embryo which you bear within you quickened?" If she to whom the question is put is one who has had dealings with the Eternal, her Saviour,

concerning some spiritual secret of hers, she may well answer boldly with the Lady of Shunem, "Peace! it is well," for she knows in whom she believes.

I do not dispute the fact that there are sudden as well as gradual changes of motive and character in the kingdom of Grace. The eyes of the spiritually blind may be opened in a moment to see what they had before denied. To some the consciousness of a sudden and complete change of desires, affections, and motives is so strong that they are impelled, by their own wonder, joy, and gratitude to him who has worked that change, to stand up at once, and openly proclaim what God has done for them. Many have been the true testimonies given to a sudden change of heart and will; but it should be remembered that even then the long education of the soul may be only just beginning, the unlearning of wrong habits, and the learning of right ones; that even

long after the spiritual renewal there is often a grievous darkness and ignorance concerning matters of moral conduct, which darkness may only give place very gradually to light and knowledge.

An immediate and open testimony and confession of faith are for many a great help and safeguard. They are especially so to persons drawn out of a low stratum of moral and social life, who are surrounded still by the atmosphere of recklessness, depravity and ignorance in which they had been brought up, and the breathing of which threatens to drag them back into the habits and traditions of evil from which they had escaped. The open announcement, "I am now on God's side," is a great lever power for the soul so poised.

But, as I have said before, there is no uniformity in God's dealings with the souls of men, and we do wrong to say, "lo ! here, and lo ! there," as if we knew anything certainly of

those whom he is patiently drawing from death into life.

To return to the Lady of Shunem. She passes Gehazi and hastens to the Master. On reaching him, she falls prostrate before him and holds him by the feet. To this moment, to this attitude and interview her whole soul had been hastening forward from the moment that the eyes of her beloved child had closed in death. Gehazi thinks there is a want of reverence in the manner of her approach to the prophet, that the grasp of her hands is too firm, her appeal too passionate and urgent. Like many another man, like many a priestly or ecclesiastical authority, he would have interposed himself between the woman and her God. The pestilent doctrine of our excellent Milton that *he* (man) was made for God, and *she* for God *in him*, is of ancient origin, and has been of long duration in the world. Our Lord's disciples themselves were not freed from the

poison of the notion concerning the inferior position of woman, even in her relation to God. They rebuked the women as troublesome, intrusive creatures, who were so taken up with their babies that they must needs thrust themselves into the circle of the disciples and other auditors surrounding the Divine Teacher, their children in their arms, or running by their knees, in order to win for those little ones a look, a touch of the loving hand, and a word of blessing. They were out of place there, troubling the Master, and interrupting his inspired discourse.

But Jesus judged quite otherwise. When he saw the temper of his disciples towards the women he was "much displeased." He rebuked the men, even his own loyal disciples, and blessed the mothers in blessing their children. The same disciples, judging in like manner of the Syrophœnician mother and her irrepressible appeal, said to the Lord, "Send her away, for she crieth after us." But the Lord had altogether

another thought. He was carrying out a purpose, in this brief but pathetic drama, through which should be presented on the one hand an example of faith and of the divine energy of maternal love destined to stand to the end of time as an encouragement and a joy to the humble, and on the other hand a figure or type of his loving reception and gathering in of the Gentile world; for she was an outsider, not belonging to the household of God, an outcast from the commonwealth of Israel, "a dog," as she confessed herself willing to be styled, if she might but receive deliverance for her afflicted daughter.

Elisha, in the spirit of Christ, rebuked his servant when he would have "thrust away" the woman and mother. "*Let her alone,*" he said, "for her soul is vexed within her." Let her alone! Let no one dare to interpose between her and me. Such is the mind, the word of Christ concerning every afflicted mother

who makes her appeal to him. Let her pour out the whole bitterness of her soul before him. He will forgive the too great violence of that storm of love and woe which has flung her at his feet. He created the mother's heart, and he knows how to deal with it, how to bear with its madness. He understands her, and he will grant it to her so clearly to understand *Him*, that she shall no more need to resort to human aid, or to seek human teaching, concerning the matters nearest to her heart.

O ! tender and majestic attitude of the Saviour of women. O ! blessed, warning command to all men to "let her alone," to let her frankly and fearlessly speak out all ! Do not warn her against too near an approach or too great boldness of speech, for in such supreme moments of direst need, the deepest reverence is expressed by the boldness of the unfaltering appeal and the illimitable hope and trust.

Then Elisha deputes Gehazi to go quickly in

advance and lay his staff on the child, that perchance life may return. But this does not satisfy her. She dreads it. She cannot accept any intermediary or deputy. None but himself, who is to her the Saviour, can give life and consolation.

And now she utters her solemn vow, and resolve, and confession : “*As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee.*” That form of words, “as the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth,” was the most sacred and solemn that the Israelites knew and could make use of in uttering an oath or vow. “I will not leave thee ;” even as Jacob said to the angel, “I will not let thee go unless thou bless me.” This is the turning point. The search, the anguish, the divinely-inspired resolve had reached a crisis. Midnight is past, “the cross begins to bend.” Victory is already proclaimed. Most wonderful and dear to the heart of God is his creature’s expressed and firm resolve, “I will not leave

thee." How he must love that grasp of the hand of faith, which will not relax, not even at the advice or warning of the servants of God who wait on him and are very intimate with him, as Gehazi was with his master !

Elisha yields ; "he arose and followed her." She has conquered. And I do not think that that return journey was loaded with the anguish of the first. The tension of faith's trial was relaxed. The fact that he—the Saviour to her—had arisen to follow her as soon as she uttered her solemn vow and resolve, was an earnest to her of all that followed.

It seems to me that there were two distinct stages in the experience of the Lady of Shunem, as here narrated. In the first stage it is all unrest and bitter sorrow, striving and hurried action. In the second, it is comparative peace—calm after storm. Her attitude is now that of one who already possesses by promise, and of "Divine right," the blessing claimed, though that blessing

is not yet actually realized. Resting is substituted for wrestling ; silent, expectant waiting for agonizing suspense and passionate pleading.

I should like to express here what has struck me as significant, namely, that in this case the mother did not bring her child to the Saviour, but she brought the Saviour to her child. This has been to me a fruitful thought, conveying a lesson which I much needed to learn. We sometimes weary ourselves with unrepaying labour to move our children along the right path, or, if they will not be urged, we endeavour to invite, allure, "influence" them for good, getting others to help us and second our efforts. We are afraid to let them alone. Our sense of responsibility about the matter becomes a heavy burden. We grow anxious and nervous, and too watchful of every symptom, encouraging or the reverse. We strain every nerve to set them right, and to make them good ; and, although we know that we cannot ourselves impart the

smallest spark of spiritual life, still we persuade ourselves that so much must depend on us, that we dare not relax our exertions, and cannot make too much effort. But we *can* make too much effort on these lines, to the neglect, probably, in some degree, of the other direction in which our efforts should flow. Meanwhile the soul concerning which we are so conscientiously busy and anxious may become wearied and worried even by the most delicate obvious efforts to win it to God. There sometimes comes to be a want of spontaneity in our efforts thus made, and a laboured sound in the "words in season" which we feel called upon to speak. The young are quick to discern any want of spontaneity and naturalness, if I may so call it. There are times, of course, when words of warning and rebuke, as well as of persuasion, are absolutely called for, and must be faithfully spoken. Yet it seems to me that God himself frequently drives us away from all these strivings

in order to force us to cast ourselves and all our burdens and interests only and entirely on him, and to lead us to rely on his word, his character, his attributes, as our only sure hope.

If the Lady of Shunem had lingered around the bed of her son, using every known restorative in the hope of reviving him, if she had called in physicians, or friends, or servants, or had kneeled by him in prayer, watching him meanwhile, in order to catch the first indication that her prayer was about to be answered, she would have lost time, and missed a memorable triumph. She had the wisdom and firmness to leave him, to turn her back for a time on her beloved child, to cover up the dead, white face, turn away, and close the door upon him, in order that she might open another, the only door of sure hope, by coming face to face with him who to her was the Saviour, by appealing to him, claiming him, holding him fast, until she won from him his ready consent to *come to her child*,

to go with her, in order to bring back to her her son.

When you have done all you can—perhaps even done too much—to mould or influence the character and heart of your child, and are still forced to exclaim, “The child is not awaked,” will you not try the method of the Lady of Shunem? *Leave all* to follow Christ; leave even your children awhile, until you have made a further and deeper acquaintance with him, and have definitely vowed to him, recorded your fixed resolve at his feet, embraced his promise, and been assured by himself that he can and will undertake to do for you that which is beyond your power, and the power of any human being. Hold humbly, patiently, to the promise, and to him who makes it, until you have the assurance which he is waiting to give you, and so *bring him to the child whom you have not yet been able to bring to the Saviour.*

We come to the last page of the story. Ob-

serve the quietness and peace which have come over the scene. The child is not yet "awaked." Not yet does the mother *see* her heart's desire fulfilled. When she last looked at the dear face, the seal of death was upon it, and as yet that seal has not been removed. There is no change in him. But there is a change in *her*. Her heart is tranquil ; she can now patiently, even joyfully, *wait*. She possesses already, *by faith*, her heart's desire.

In her quietness and patient waiting, she keeps her hands off her child. She does not even go near him. She asks no eager questions of him into whose hands she has committed him, nor of any other. The natural impulse of many mothers, in such a situation, would lead them to bustle about, and offer help in any way possible to the physician in charge of the case ; and it would seem to them probably only right so to act. It is not all Christian parents who know what it is to claim and accept a good gift

of God, and then to be still, to stand aside and wait, and let *him* work who does not need our little aid, much less our agitation ; although in a deeper and more solemn sense he calls us to be “fellow-workers” with him.

I picture the Lady of Shunem, now serene, and firm as a rock, possibly going calmly about her household duties, or resting in contemplation of the miracle of love which God, through his prophet, she trusted was about to perform. She did not apparently even approach the door of the room which was closed upon the two beings whom she had laboured to bring together ; for when her child was restored to life, the prophet bade his servant “go and call her” as beforetimes, and only then did she present herself.

Still reticent and strong, but with a brighter, sweeter light illuminating her whole life and soul than she had ever known before, she spoke no word to her son, nor did she embrace him,

until she had fallen at the feet of the prophet, who was to her the Saviour, and “bowed herself to the ground,” and “worshipped God,” the Author of Life. And *then* she turned to her child and took him in her arms—a mother thrice blessed—destined to take her rank through all the future ages of the world in the record of faithful “women who received their dead raised to life again.”

CHAPTER III.

ABRAHAM AS A FATHER.

I AM not about to consider the history of Abraham just now in its great, typical character. It is not of Abraham the Seer, the forerunner of the Messiah, that I want to speak, but simply of Abraham as a father, a human and earthly father. The most mystic and type-seeking of theologians will not deny that Abraham was a man, a father of children, and that he had human feelings as strongly as any other father. If he had not had these human feelings, the great typical act of his life, the sacrifice of Isaac (in will and in intention in obedience to God) would be bereft of its meaning ; the sacrifice would have been no real sacrifice. It is to Abraham as a father that I am attracted ; not

an unspiritual or worldly father, but a father who held hourly converse with God, and to whom the spiritual future, and all the blessings to the human race with which it was charged, had been marvellously revealed. To persons accustomed, as he was, to commune with God concerning those whom they love, the history of Abraham, and the trials of his faith as a parent, bring a special message.

There are learned and excellent commentators who seem almost entirely to lose sight of Abraham as a father, as a man, in the contemplation of the typical character in reference to the future of the kingdom of Christ, with which the several episodes in his life are universally understood to be invested. Jesus said, "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day, and he saw it and was glad ;" proving that he was indeed a great prophet, a seer, divinely enlightened to see the day of grace through the incarnation of One whose earthly descent would

be in a direct line from himself. He was among the first named of that great “cloud of witnesses” who, by faith, saw the fulfilment of the promises, who “greeted them from afar,” and held them fast, hundreds of years before their actual accomplishment.

But, in all humility, I venture for the moment to confine my attention to Abraham the man, the parent, and to ask of him what he has to teach *me*, a parent, no seer, no typical being of any kind, but just a mother, with a good measure of a mother’s love, and hopes, and strong desires. For in every great typical or prophetic incident of the Jewish Scriptures, in the grand and widely-embracing words of prophecy, and in the gracious promises to the nations, and to the world, we are surely justified in finding also messages to the individual soul. I judge it to be so from many sacred analogies, and from certain words of our Lord Jesus, and of his disciples, in which a near and tenderly personal

application seems to be given now and again to promises and pleadings which had nevertheless, and primarily, a national or a world-wide application, and a meaning as vast as eternity. Such, for example, is that exquisite 54th chapter of Isaiah, a glorious Epiphany, a call from the infinite heart of God to the vast, hopeless, and outcast Gentile world, the “world lying in wickedness.” This mass of outcast humanity is addressed by God, under the form of a woman despised and forsaken, in the most marvellously tender and pathetic manner. The riches of the Hebrew language seem to be exhausted in the heaping up, so to speak, of consolations, loving pleadings, and assurances. “For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee. In overflowing wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer.” . . . “For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be

removed ; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee. O, thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted, behold, I will set thy stones in fair colours, and lay thy foundations with sapphires" "and all thy children shall be taught of the Lord, and great shall be the peace of thy children." We know that these words foreshadow the great gathering in of the Gentile world. Thanks be to God for the wide horizon of hope revealed in them ! Yet how many thousands of mothers, "tossed with tempest, and not comforted," have read these last words I have quoted, and risen up, "out of weakness made strong." They have grasped them to their hearts as a single, solitary soul, alone with God, grasps a promise which is life to that soul, speaking to no one, giving ear to no criticism concerning its primary application, but embracing it, and living and

walking in the daily peace, power, and joy imparted by it.

It is of the message, then, to the individual soul which Abraham's history may have to offer, that for the moment I wish to speak. His long, long trial of faith in connection with his fatherhood is, for me, a monument towards which it is good to turn again and again. Let us recall it.

The first mention of Abraham is in the first verse of the 12th chapter of Genesis, where God told him to get out of his country, and away from his kindred and his father's house, and go to a strange land.

Persons who dwell very strongly on the necessity of the complete separation, even isolation, of the soul consecrated to God, sometimes appear to be haunted by a distrust of the domestic affections, as possible hindrances which should be given up. They point to this call of separation given to Abraham as a stern example of God's requirements. True, the words of Christ

are stern, in his call to whole-hearted devotion to his kingdom and person. Father, mother, wife, children, brethren and sisters must be second, must, if need be, be given up for his sake. But if we look further, does it not seem that the giving up is often—nay, always—in God's will and purpose, in order that those lost to us for a time may be found again for ever?

But stay ! Abraham did not go out alone. Our God is ever the same God. His attributes and titles are unchangeable as himself ; and he has been pleased to call himself the “God of all the *families*” of his people. The family is ever embraced in his thoughts of blessing to the individual. Abraham took his family with him—such as it was. He had no child then, but he took with him Sarai his wife, and Lot his nephew, whom he had adopted, and “all their substance,” and “all the souls that they had gotten in Haran.” “The souls they had con-

verted to the Law in Charran," says Gesenius ; "The souls whom they had proselytized," say the Targums. The servants became, in a patriarchal family, as children of the house. He also took his father with him. For it is written in the 11th chapter of Genesis, 31st verse, that Terah went with his son Abraham to Canaan, and that Terah died in Haran while with his son.

Abraham went first to the plain of Moreh, where he lived like one of the wandering Bedouins. It was here that God first appeared to him, with the promise to himself and his children ; and Abraham believed the word spoken to him by God, and built an altar and "called upon the name of the Lord." Later he went to Egypt, to avoid the famine in Canaan ; in Egypt he had varying experiences ; he became a rich man, and returned to Canaan, to the spot where he had at first pitched his tent, near Bethel.

Here God renewed his promise to him, saying,

“All the land which thou seest (and from the place whence he looked he had a wide view, north and south, east and west) I will give to thee and to thy seed for ever.” Again Abraham built an altar to the Lord, and continued to walk by faith ; “the father of the faithful.” He saw not yet by what possible means the fulfilment of the promise could be brought about. Each year which passed made its fulfilment less probable ; nay, it became, humanly speaking, an impossibility.

We come to the third revelation of God to Abraham, the most solemn of all, the most needed and the most reassuring, granted to him at a time when his faith had been most severely tried. He was growing old, and had as yet no child ; yet the Lord had spoken, and his word could not fail. He was surrounded by strangers, people of corrupt morals ; he had been engaged in war with the five kings, which might be renewed, or lead to reprisals. Being human, he

must have had periods of depression, if not of doubt. This time, therefore, the Divine word to him was full of comfort and strength. “Fear not, Abraham ; I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward.” Abraham’s answer betrays the internal controversy, the painful questionings of one whose own condition and the circumstances around him seem, in every way, to contradict the word of God, and to mock the heart worn by long delays. He replies, “Lord God, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless ; behold, to me thou hast given no seed.”

I think an echo of this perplexity has often sounded in a Christian mother’s soul. Her heart is aching, has ached, perhaps, for years, over some beloved child or children. Her Bible speaks to her of God’s willingness to bless. Friends, pastors, and teachers reiterate pleasant and gracious words—that God is *her* shield, her saviour, her exceeding great reward. But her heart is going forward through the eternal future

of that soul or those souls whom she loves as only a mother can, and she feels, “What will you give me ? I know what my God is to *me* ; but that does not assuage my grief, since still I see not my desire granted for those others, my own flesh and blood, the souls for which I would lay down my life.”

Abraham makes allusion to the steward of his house, Elieser of Damascus, intimating that God’s meaning and purpose may be that he and his descendants should be his heirs, and the recipients of all the promised blessings. But God reassures him in the plainest manner on this head. It should be his own child, and not another, who should inherit the promises.

Then God led Abraham forth, in the silence of the night, when the world lay asleep under that clear eastern sky, and bade him look up at the countless millions of stars, asking him if he was able to count them. “So shall thy seed be,” God declares. Doubt was laid to rest. To

the soul of Abraham, the solemn silence, the outspread glory of the heavens, and above all, the near and awful presence of the Divine Being spoke to him as never before.

God's resources are infinite. The teachings, consolations, and spiritual revealings which were sufficient for the infancy of our faith, do not suffice for the spirit buffeted, and worn, and exhausted by repeated assaults of doubt, and by long trial of waiting. But God has surprises of grace for us. On the eve of an apparently approaching shipwreck of our faith, his mighty arm is found to be underneath us. He (the author and finisher of our faith) revives and mightily increases our over-strained and almost perishing confidence, until we become *a wonder to ourselves.*

“The steps of faith
Fall on the seeming void, and find
The rock beneath.”

“Abraham believed,” it is written, “and it was counted to him for righteousness.” On

this several passages in the Epistle to the Romans are based in the setting forth of that everlasting truth concerning the faith which justifies and saves—the truth to which, through all controversies, the varying history of God's people on earth bears steady witness. It is by faith that we stand—we sinners—absolved, pure, and fair in the sight of the holy God ; accepted in the Beloved Son. It is by faith that we grow in likeness to him, that we endure, war, labour, and work miracles ; by faith that, as fellow-workers with him, we hasten the coming of the reign of justice and righteousness on earth.

Yet while Abraham, thus reassured, stood at this solemn moment on the heights of faith's inner citadel, he recalled his past experience. There might again be times when his light would burn dim, and his trust in God be tried and strained to the utmost ; and he asked for a sign.

There are times in which, I think, we are

justified in asking for a sign. God may not see fit to grant us a sign in the way we desire. He may prefer to work a miracle in ourselves—a miracle of larger trust and more perfect confidence in himself—so that we shall cease to crave any other sign than that—his own spirit's work and voice within us. Yet he is not displeased that we should ask a sign. He appears to have been displeased with Ahaz when he refused to ask a sign (Isaiah vii., 12, 13); I have observed that very humble people are sometimes filled with fear at the thought of asking such a favour of God. They are haunted by the words which the Lord spoke of the cavilling Jews, “This wicked and adulterous generation seeketh a sign, and there shall no sign be given to it save the sign of the prophet Jonas.” But you, dear heart, fainting under the burden of some dire suspense, or long-sought and long-delayed blessing, do not be discouraged by the suggestion that it is faithless or unjustifiable to ask for a

sign. You are not a “wicked and adulterous generation.” We may speak freely to our Father, and express every wish and thought of our hearts to him, as our own little children do to us. It was only the cavilling critics to whom he refused a sign, to people who asked to see a miracle performed only in order to judge and criticize after their own fashion. God responded twice, readily and graciously, to Gideon’s request for a sign. Gideon had asked for it as an assurance that it was the Lord God indeed with whom he was speaking, and who was sending him forth on a “forlorn hope” expedition. Hezekiah asked a sign, in confirmation of the promise of a prolonged life, and God granted his request. You and I, also, Christian parents, want to be assured that God is speaking to us, here—now—in this nineteenth century, and that he is guiding us to take up and boldly maintain *a position stronger than any yet known in the history of faith.*

Nevertheless, let us continue to covet earnestly the *best* gifts, and the best blessings. The Saviour was wonderfully good and indulgent towards his sceptical disciple, St. Thomas. He lovingly granted him the sign which the disciple declared he could not dispense with, if he were to believe indeed that his Lord was risen from the dead. He was certainly blest, as well as convinced; yet in blessing him the Lord announced that there were, and are, and will be to the end of time, recipients of a far greater blessing than his who was permitted to touch the sacred wounds in the hands and side of the visibly present Saviour. Remember at all times, and above all at times when you most long for an outward sign, his words, “Blessed are they that have *not* seen, and yet have believed.”

But our spiritual perceptions are often not sufficiently clear and refined to enable us to see signs which are being granted to us, gracious, gentle signs, sometimes succeeding each other

day by day, but unrecognized by us. By a sign is not always meant a palpable miracle worked before the eyes. When we ask for a sign, we mean, and we want, a simple confirmation of our faith, granted by God's mercy to our longing hearts, and designed by himself as a token of his acceptance of our desires and prayers.

Nathaniel, the Israelite in whom was no guile, sat alone under his fig tree, thinking, in the presence of God. His thoughts were read by the Son of God as he passed through Galilee, gathering disciples on the way. When the astonished Nathaniel, meeting Jesus, was unexpectedly greeted by him, he asked, "Whence knowest thou me?" Jesus answered him, giving him a sign, or confirmation of his knowledge of him, in the words, "When thou wast under the fig tree I saw thee." Nathaniel had been alone under the fig tree, unseen of any. This word of Jesus was enough. "Rabbi," he exclaimed, "thou art the Son of God; thou art

the King of Israel." It would seem that Jesus felt something like a glad and sweet surprise at the simplicity of faith of this man, in whom was no guile. "Because I said I saw thee under the fig tree" (because of this little sign) "believest thou? Thou shalt see greater things than these."

We have need to pray, "Keep our eyes clear, O God! that we may not fail to see the many loving signs which Thou givest us in answer to our prayers; for too often we see them not, because of our downcast looks, or heavy hearts, or careless walk." When I am told of any sign, however small, of God's spirit working in the soul of one over whom I have watched with love and prayer, I feel impelled to lift up my heart at once in praise to God, and to acknowledge his presence and power. It is an ungracious and unthankful spirit which would object, in the presence of any such hopeful indications. "I must not let this deceive me; I

want to see a real and unmistakeable change in that character, and to hear an open confession," which attributes each brightening of the spiritual prospect—such as a loving word spoken, a more open countenance, or a change of habits—to merely natural causes, so called; which expresses itself in warnings, such as "We must not be led away by outward appearances," or "This will not last." Though we may not be far from the truth in indulging in such surmises, assuredly the temper of Nathaniel brings us much nearer the truth—the readiness to say at once, "I thank Thee, O God"—to translate for good rather than for evil the signs which meet the outward eye, while the soul's regard is fixed on him. Charity—the divine charity which burns in the heart of God to all his creatures—"believeth all things, and hopeth all things." I have known persons zealous for the salvation of souls who, nevertheless, seem possessed by the spirit which "doubteth all things, and suspecteth all things." I am sure

the Nathaniel temper is dearer to God. “Because of this very little sign of good,” the Lord seems to say to his hopeful and guileless disciple, “believest thou? I will show thee greater things than this, and grant thee plainer signs to rejoice thy poor heart.”

Then God directed Abraham to build again an altar, and to lay the sacrifice upon it, and to watch by it until the evening. This was the day following the solemn night when God bade him look up to the stars.

Abraham obeyed; he watched, waited, and fasted all day, his soul fixed on God. Evening came. The sun was going down. A deep sleep fell upon him, and a “horror of great darkness.” A supreme moment was at hand. When Jehovah draws near to a waiting soul, it is not always wholly peace to that soul. In the light of the presence of the Most Holy, contrasts are seen; abysses of darkness are revealed as well as heights of glory. In the midst of this trance

God spoke to Abraham once more, telling him more than he had yet told him of the future, and reiterating his unfailing promise.

Then, when "the sun went down, and it was dark," the sign was given which Abraham had asked. A lambent flame, a clear, burning tongue of fire, descended from heaven, and passed over and through the sacrifice on the altar, signifying the presence of the living God.

Time passed on.

TEN YEARS

had now passed since the first utterance of the promise to Abraham, and still there seemed no approach towards its fulfilment. Sarai's faith appears to have become extinct. Abraham faltered. Even he, the "father of the faithful," wavered now. But God is patient. He wearies not, nor fails, even when his most devoted servants doubt and disappoint him. Then Sarai persuaded her husband *to take in hand himself*

the bringing about of the fulfilment of the promise. It was evident that God's word had some meaning not exactly in accord with what, at first, it seemed to have. "O ! faithless heart, you dare not, will not continue any longer to endure these years of believing and trusting in him who has spoken. He means you, you think, to do something yourself, to seize the fruition of his promise by some act of your own, and *thus* make good his word." And so poor Sarai sets to work to meddle with God's great designs, and undermines her husband's wavering faith, drawing him to a lower standard, and an unworthy, earthly kind of reading of the Divine will. Concubinage was allowed in those times, though it never seemed to bring good luck or blessing into households. A son of one of their slaves will do well enough, Sarai thinks. Hagar is to be devoted by her mistress to the task of bringing forth an heir to Abraham's childless house, and so the long waiting and suspense will at last be ended.

Abraham fell ; for it was a fall ; and troubles and anxieties, which he well deserved, were waiting for him.

I continue to follow Abraham, the servant and friend of God, in his fatherhood. I shall return later to Hagar. Ishmael was born. The Patriarch's mind was not, I should think, wholly at rest as to this being the promised son, on whom should depend so long a train of blessing ; and this unrest, or at least uncertainty, was destined to continue for some *thirteen years*.

Again, for the fourth time, God appeared to Abraham. He opened his word to him now with an injunction, "Walk before me, and be thou perfect." Perfect means, in this Scripture, "upright, sincere." Had Abraham been always and entirely upright and sincere ? It was now twenty-two or twenty-three years since the promise was first made to him. It was a long time to wait in the perfection of trust and uprightness before God.

The promise, and the covenant made by God with Abraham were this time announced in fuller, clearer language than before. Sarai is also named—"She shall be the mother of nations." Then the veil fell from Abraham's eyes, showing him his error, and his unworthy reading of the promise of God. He had "limited the Holy One of Israel."

God speaks plainly; but we are tempted by our doubting hearts to think that he cannot mean quite all that he says. We attach imaginary conditions to his promises. We think, "this may be directed to somebody, to everybody, but not to me." I dare not take it literally, we mentally say, although our conscience may at the very moment be protesting against our wretched conjectures and limitations of God's love and power.

God had meant what he said; but Sarai first, and then Abraham, had taken upon themselves to think that the promise was not to be under-

stood literally, and so they had taken the matter into their own miserable management.

God now announces to Abraham that he shall have a son—the child of Sarai his wife—Isaac ; the name signifies laughter, or gladness. Abraham laughs in his heart when he hears it—the laughter of joyful surprise. He was prostrate before God. I cannot help pondering on what passed through the father's heart at that moment. If he was a whole, true man, a true father as I believe he was, I think I see what prompted his sudden transition of thought from Isaac, the child of laughter and joy, to Ishmael, his other child, less fortunate, less blest, less favoured of heaven. It is what any father with a generous heart, filled with the pity which tender fathers feel, would have experienced, and do constantly experience. A great gleam of hope and joy is granted to us concerning some of our children, natural or spiritual, and our hearts laugh and sing for joy ;

and then, into the centre of our joy there comes a cloud, a sadness, as another vision rises before us, a pang of longing, of pity, of sympathy, all the keener because of our joy for the more favoured ones. “Hast thou but one blessing, O my Father ?” the soul cries out, “Wilt thou not bless this other also ; shall he be forgotten ? Whilst thou art blessing, Lord, wilt thou not bless him also, my erring, my unhappy, my little-gifted child ?” There are strong contrasts sometimes in the same family, or, with much family likeness in character, one heart is watered by the dew of heaven, while another remains dry and hard. Or a member of a family, equally loved and cared for with the rest, errs so far as to be called, in the world’s language, the “black sheep.” The character of the true mother resembles in some degree that of the Good Shepherd. While loving all alike, her compassion, and toil, and soul-travail may be called out for one especially in her flock.

She is willing for a time to leave the ninety-and-nine to go after the erring one, for whom she will pass through fire and water, and danger unto death. She knows that the others are in a better way—it may be safe in the fold—and her whole soul follows the one who is not yet in the better way. She may be reproached and told that the least worthy is the most loved by her. No, not the most loved, but as the most in need, the most assiduously followed and yearned over in secret.

“O, THAT ISHMAEL MIGHT LIVE BEFORE
THEE,”

Abraham said. He does not speak of Isaac. He takes the good news into his heart with laughter of joy, and then suddenly the vision rises before him of poor, wayward Ishmael—for Ishmael does not seem to have been a very good boy—and hence the cry. “O, that he might live before thee!” Ishmael was in no

peril of his life, not sick or likely to die ; “O, that he might live *before thee*” meant, with Abraham, to be acknowledged of God, to live the true life of a being on whom the blessing of heaven rested.

An esteemed commentator thus speaks of this passage :—“These words, ‘O, that Ishmael might live before thee,’ may be interpreted in two ways : either ‘I dare not hope for so great a boon as a son to be born to myself and Sarai in our old age ; but O, that Ishmael may be the heir of Thy promises ;’ or they may imply only a fear that now, when another heir is assured, Ishmael should be excluded from all future inheritance.” And thus do other commentators explain it. They may be right in assuming that Abraham’s mind was exclusively occupied with the question of succession, and the future blessings involved in it, or with the securing of a comfortable inheritance for Ishmael ; but I should be sorry to think that they were right.

I cannot believe that the holy paternal feeling, the natural affection of the father for his child, was so entirely subordinated in Abraham to other feelings and motives. I have a better opinion of Abraham. A man of far-reaching vision, who walked with God, and rejoiced to see the day of the Christ—the Desire of all Nations—he was yet a man of strong and manly affections. This is shown when, later, Sarai decreed that Ishmael should be expelled from his father's home, and “the thing was very grievous in Abraham's sight, because of his son.” The father's heart is revealed plainly enough there. As a prophet alone, bereft of the nobility which his complete humanness gives him, his history would be shorn of many a comforting and wholesome lesson.

O, take courage, mothers of Ishmaels ! God answered the cry of this father's heart, and he will answer yours. I recall the vivid impression made on me one day, as I read this incident. I

had been perplexed by the difficulty which some characters seem to present even to God himself—by the inaptitude of some to receive the things of God—and I had been vexing my heart over the inequalities in the distribution of providential gifts to the different members even of one household. Some seem to be “born to ill-luck,” or to be so strangely and inharmoniously put together in character as to defy all the usual means and hopes of good when applied to their case ; others are so defective in the moral sense or in judgment, that good gifts of intellect and heart possessed by them are thereby more or less wasted or warped. Thinking thus, my eyes fell on the words, “O, that Ishmael might live before thee”—poor, unlucky Ishmael, the “wild ass of the desert ;” I recalled the many perverse, or afflicted, or unfortunate creatures I had met with, and the cry of my heart went up for all the Ishmaels, while tears of joy fell on the page wherein is recorded God’s answer concerning

Ishmael. “*As for Ishmael,*” God said, “*I have heard thee; behold, I have blessed him;*” and when God blesses, that is enough; it includes all. No matter how wayward, how difficult the character—poor mother—of that son or that daughter; no matter how far your Ishmael seems *now* from all that you desire him to be, far also, perhaps, from yourself, from home, from God—estranged or indifferent; if you continue to hold fast your God, and to wait in faith and in patience for him to speak, you shall hear the words, “*As for thy Ishmael, I have heard thee; behold, I have blessed him.*” Take the words, take them as very truth. They are yours of right; for you are Christ’s, and in him “all things are yours.” In him “*all the promises of God are (to you) yea and amen.*”

God says, “Behold, I have blessed.” You do not see the blessing; perhaps you will not see it for awhile yet. But think again of Abraham, of the long, long years of waiting which he endured,

of the trial upon trial of faith to which he was subjected, up to that last most terrible trial, when he was commanded to slay the son, the beloved, in whom all the promises were centred. At that time Abraham must have looked back upon a period of some thirty-five years, from the time when the first promise was made to him by God. Very tardily had the promise been fulfilled so far as the birth of a son was concerned, through whom such great blessings were to come; and now, after some years of calm and rest in the blessedness of faith's fruition, he was called not only to witness the destruction of all these hopes, in the death of him who must now have become the beloved of his heart, the priceless treasure of his home, but to bring about that destruction with his own hand. Sharp and awful was the trial, but the obedience was perfect, and the victory complete and final.

“ He believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness.”

The Lord Jesus says to us quite plainly, if we ask anything which our souls desire, and which we know to be in accord with his own desires, “Believe that ye receive, and ye *shall have*.” Realize that you receive *now*, for he says not “believe that ye *shall receive*,” but “that ye receive.” *He* has blessed *now*, even while you were kneeling before him, and you shall have. You have the blessing *now* by your faith in his word, which “cannot be broken ;” and some day—a day known to him—you shall have, possess, grasp, and laugh for joy over the full accomplishment of your desire, in the incarnation of the blessing of God in that dear son or daughter, or friend, that Ishmael over whom you have so long perplexed your wearied brain, and broken your loving heart.

CHAPTER IV.

THE BAR SINISTER.

I SAID I would return to Hagar.

The Apostle Paul, in his letter to the Galatians, as you know, makes use of the story of Sarah and Hagar, and their sons, as an allegory to represent “the two Covenants,” the two Dispensations, the Jewish and the Christian, the Law and the Gospel. It is a very striking allegory for that purpose. That unworthy page in Abraham’s history was typical of the discord between the two principles—that of the old and that of the new Dispensation. The earlier, the imperfect, must needs be expelled before the later born and perfect could have full and free scope.

But in quite another sense I regard the story

as typical. It is the earliest recorded embodiment in practice of a humanly decreed injustice which has prevailed ever since in society, more or less, in different times and in different lands, poisoning the sources of human life, and bearing disastrous fruits for the world.

Here are two women—one the lawful, respected, and respectable wife; the other, of inferior rank, no wife at all, not the chosen of man through any high motive of love or soul's election, but simply made use of for a time and purpose—a supplement to what God had already bestowed on man, and claimed by him to serve his own lower interests. Hagar is

THE TYPICAL OUTCAST.

Sarai, after having herself advised her husband to take Hagar as his concubine, acts the heartless part which respectable womanhood (with noble exceptions) has too frequently acted ever since. “Cast out the bondwoman and

her son." This has been the verdict of countless generations. "Cast her out, with her unlawful offspring. Get rid of her, keep her out of sight. Set up a barrier between these and those. Mark, strong and dark, the Bar Sinister athwart her destiny, so that the legitimate wife may never hear or dare to speak of the existence of the outcast, who shall be for ever accursed."

It was long before Ishmael was born that this unworthy drama opened. Hagar was about to become a mother; Sarai remained childless; discord and jealousy arose. Sarai reproached Abraham, who had but acted on her advice; "The Lord judge between me and thee!" she taunted him, and he turned upon her, saying, "Behold, thy maid is in thy hands; do to her as it pleaseth thee." And "when Sarai dealt hardly with her, she fled from her face." What an unlovely story this of the Hebrew matron beating her wretched

slave till she was forced to save herself by flight, the husband acquiescing ! And because the apostle made use of this incident in his passionate desire to clear away the mist of doctrinal error from the minds of his lapsed Galatian converts, and by familiar illustration to set forth the development of the purpose of God in the substitution of the covenant of Grace for the Law, shall we, therefore, speak softly of the conduct of Sarai and Abraham in this matter ? I prefer to express frankly my disgust. To abstain from condemnation of their action would be to seem to charge God with approval of heartlessness and cruelty. The sacred writers never excuse, or call upon us to condone, what is wrong, immoral, or unjust in the life and conduct of the chosen servants of God, whose sins and errors he punishes and chastens, while he forgives. I am perplexed, in reading certain commentators, in noting a degree of—shall I call it complacency ?—in their judgment of this

story of Hagar, as if God himself had ordained each step in it, and Sarai had done well. It may be that an exclusive dwelling on the allegorical use made by St. Paul of the facts has encouraged this complacency, and so the cry “Cast out the bondwoman and her son” has, to some minds, lost its character of meanness and unmercifulness. But God is never, and can never be, the author or inspirer of any evil or selfish thought or deed. I continue to regard this and every part of Abraham’s history from the human side, while trying to read it truly, as under the eye of God. My reading of it may only be a motherly, a womanly reading of it, and theologically worthless. Be it so ! St. Paul was not a father, nor was the human heart of the man stirring in him—at the moment when he wrote to the Galatians—in the direction of pity for the outcast woman. In any case, the facts remain. There they are—the other side of the picture.

Irresistibly I am led on, in thought, through

the ages, down to these later times, when the false principles underlying this conduct of the patriarch and his wife, as here recorded, had ripened and borne their natural fruit, when the world came to be filled with Hagar's, and the line of demarcation between favoured womanhood and the outcast became more and more rigid and immovable, a "great gulf fixed," so that no passing from the one side to the other was possible; and this became the accepted condition of things, the baser sort among men proclaiming it to be inevitable, and evolving from the depths of their own egotism the mighty falsehood that it is necessary for the preservation of the purity of family life.

Christ's teaching and action inaugurated a new era; but his professed followers have been, and still are, in a great measure, blind to the light of his new day, and unfaithful to his teaching. Virtuous womanhood, trained under the influence of the egotism of men, has consented

for ages that the outcast should exist, and continue to be an outcast. But now, thanks be to God, the new era has, at last, indeed begun to dawn upon us !

After the birth of Isaac (Hagar having, in obedience to God, returned to the service of Sarah) we read that, on a certain day of festivity in honour of the son of the promise, Sarah (now no longer Sarai, but Sarah, the Princess) saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian mocking, and she called upon Abraham to "cast out the bondwoman and her son." The word "mocking" is given by some of the older interpreters as "playing," or "dancing gracefully." Perhaps we are mistaken in imputing spite or rudeness to Ishmael. He was at that time about thirteen years of age, and he might, in boyish fashion, have been only caressing or playing with the infant, but with a familiarity which Sarah, the Princess, did not deem suitable. That she considered Ishmael to be putting himself too much

on an equality with Isaac seems expressed in her proud words—"For the son of this bond-woman *shall not be heir with my son*, even with Isaac." If Ishmael had been insulting or ill-treating the child, Sarah would scarcely have restrained herself so far as merely to repudiate the dreaded idea of any equality between the two boys. She would, I think, have used more denunciatory language against Ishmael.

"And the thing was very grievous in Abraham's sight, because of his son." Abraham appears to have spent a night of sorrow and of indecision as to the course of action he should adopt. Sarah had given her command, and, it may be, was sleeping peacefully ; but Abraham's heart bled for Ishmael ; and in the wakeful night hours God again spoke to him. The words which record this intervention reveal the wonderful loving-kindness of God towards his servant, and towards every member of his family. "Let it not be grievous in thy sight because of

the lad, and" (not only because of the lad, but) "because of thy bondwoman." It is not stated that Abraham had felt much grief concerning the casting out of the mother of his child ; only concerning his son is his grief mentioned. But God, more just, more tender, more "mindful of his own" than the best and holiest of men can be, supplies the omission. He names both the child and the mother ; adding, "And also of the son of the bondwoman will I make a nation, because he is thy seed."

Sarah had acted cruelly, but God over-ruled her action for good. He bade Abraham not to oppose the advice of his imperious consort, but to act as she had decreed ; for if Hagar and Ishmael had been retained in the family there never would have been peace or harmony there. God allowed the rejection of Hagar and her son, not that they should remain to the end forsaken, but that his own tender pity and grace might be extended to and manifested in them. They are

to be his charge, and under his eye and protection, although driven from the sight of those who should have sheltered them. The heart of the father in Abraham saved him from the sin of initiating the cruelty enacted towards Hagar and her son ; and in his sorrow God directed and reassured him.

Then the story proceeds. When the morning dawned, Abraham took some bread and a bottle of water—enough to keep the poor outcasts alive for half a day—and laid them on Hagar's shoulder, and sent her and her child away ; and "*she departed*, and wandered in the wilderness of Beersheba." It makes one's heart ache, in picturing that desolate creature going forth with her deserted child, to recall how many millions of times that scene has been enacted since then, through all the ages. The prodigal son, whose misery is the nearest that a man's misery can be to that of the outcast woman, went forth from his father's house of his own free will, and with

more than a crust of bread and a bottle of water ; for he had a son's "portion of goods" with him. His lot was wretched enough—in a "far country," lost, despairing, dire hunger driving him to feed with swine—until the vision of the home he had left arose in his mind, and he returned to it and his father. There were no strong hands, no bars and bolts, to hinder his return, when once his own weak will was bent in the right direction. But the case of the lost daughter is sadder even than that of the lost son. It is the interest of every bad creature to *conceal her abode*. The son may be heard of, may return, even from a far country ; but all the cruelty, impurity, and avarice of earth combine to keep *her* hiding place unknown, to bar her return to the Father's house, to hold her down, to the end that, once fallen, she may rise no more, but may "minister in dreadful promiscuity" to the vilest passions of the most ignoble of men. Even if this last agony be not

in store for her, how forlorn is her state ! If she be a mother, the burden of supporting her child—an outcast with herself—is thrown upon her, weak and poor, and still, perhaps, a mere child herself in character and understanding. It is *her* child only in the eyes of the world—not his—not the unknown father's ; and happy is it for her if the struggle for life, her own and the child's, does not prove the beginning of the downward path which makes of her another “woman of the city who was a sinner.”

The most complete answer to any who might object to so purely human a reading of this story, or think the judgment expressed of Sarah too hard, is the evidence, so clear and so exquisitely consoling and sweet, of the mind and attitude of God towards this outcast mother and child. It is a great relief to turn from the earthly actors in the drama to the over-ruling God, the ever just, and ever merciful, and full of compassion.

Is it not a thought, a fact which should wake up the whole Christian world to a truer and clearer view of life as it is around us, that the first record of a direct communication from Jehovah to a woman is this of his meeting with the rejected Hagar, alone, in the wilderness ? It was not with Sarah, the Princess, or any other woman, but with Hagar, the ill-used slave, that the God of heaven stooped to converse, and to whom he brought his supreme comfort and guidance. This fact has been to me a strength and consolation in confronting the most awful problem of earth, *i.e.*, the setting apart for destruction, age after age, of a vast multitude of women—of those whom we dare to call *lost*—beyond all others lost—hopelessly lost. We ourselves, by our utmost efforts, have only so far been able to save a few, a mere handful among the multitude ; and of the others, unreached by any divinely inspired *human* help, we are apt to think with dark and dismal

foreboding. We forget that though they may be quite beyond the reach of our helping hands, they are never beyond the reach of his hand—his, who, “being put to death in the flesh,” was “quickened by the Spirit, by which also he went and preached to the spirits in prison.”* Into the vilest prison-houses of earth (I believe) he descends *alone* many a time, to save those souls buried out of the sight and ken of his servants and ministers, even as he—he alone, unaccompanied by any chosen ministers—descended into Hades and “preached the Gospel also to those that are dead,” that they who have been “judged according to men in the flesh” may “live according to God in the Spirit.”†

They say, in the creeds, that he was “crucified, dead, and buried, that he descended into hell (Hades), and rose again the third day.”

* I. Peter, iii., 18, 19.

† I. Peter, iv., 6, 7.

The repentant malefactor on the cross, turning his dying eyes on Jesus, heard him speak to him these words of eternal assurance and joy, “ *This day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise.*” The hell, then, into which the Lord of Life descended was Paradise to the dying criminal. That very day the gate of this Paradise was thrown open to him. A dimly-lighted region as it has been fabled or believed by some, it was Paradise to *him*. Why ? Because the Lord, *his Saviour*, was there ; “ *Thou shalt be with Me*,” Jesus said. I thank God for this ray of heaven’s light falling on the lot of those prisoners of Satan and of evil men, to whom no human voice has spoken of salvation, but who, “ done to death ” by the great enemy and his servants, have (I believe) many a time heard the words, as they stood on the brink, “ *This day shalt thou be with Me.*”

There were two occasions on which the Lord appeared to Hagar in the wilderness. The first

was that on which, before the birth of her child, she fled in terror from her mistress ; and “the angel of the Lord found her by a fountain of waters in the wilderness,” and called her by her name, speaking tender and reverent words to the lonely, ill-used handmaiden of Sarah. “Whence comest thou,” he asked, “And whither wilt thou go ? ” Hagar confessed that she had fled from her mistress. He then enjoined her to return to Sarah, and to bear patiently her treatment, adding words of sublime promise and blessing, even as he had done to Abraham. “Thou shalt bear a son, and shalt call his name Ishmael (or God shall hear), because the Lord hath heard thy affliction,” and she called the name of the Lord that spake unto her, “Thou God seest me.” Surprise, and gladness, and comfort filled the heart of the fugitive. She had thought herself alone and friendless, driven out to perish ; and she discovered that God had been mindful of her, had followed her every step, and now, in

her extremity, was speaking to her words of comfort, and guidance, and hope for the future.

For some thirteen years after this she remained with Sarah, serving her in the spirit of submission of which God's angel had spoken. It is to be hoped that the heart of Sarah was softened by Hagar's humility, and that her treatment of her during those years was just and kind.

But Hagar's trial at the end of those years was severer than the first. The decree went forth that she must be cast out.

Once more, taking now her little son by the hand, she wandered forth into the wilderness, carrying her bottle of water and her loaf of bread, the "portion" given to her by the father of her child. As "the day increased from heat to heat," smiting upon the wide, dry desert, where no stream or pool reflected the sun's fierce rays, and the water in her bottle was exhausted, her heart sank within her. She laid her fainting boy

under the shade of some of the desert brush-wood, and retired to the distance of a bow-shot ; for she said, “Let me not see the death of the child,” and “she lifted up her voice and wept.” *That weeping*, and the circumstances which caused it, are so often repeated in our own days as to have become quite familiar. We read in newspaper reports of deserted girl-mothers—without resources, and friendless—casting away their children, assisting their death, or slaying them outright. Scant pity is bestowed on such girl-mothers. The law lays its stern hand on them, they are hunted by police, condemned, and punished, their misery and shame published to the world ; and even yet, although the new era has begun to dawn upon us, no one asks, “Where is the father ?” or if a few ask the question, there is no following up of it—no answer. The law ignores him, and society (for the most part) is content that he should remain unknown and irresponsible. Had Hagar lived

in our days, and had there been no divine interposition on behalf of her son, she would probably have been tried for his murder, and perhaps sentenced to imprisonment for life, as was a poor girl whose case excited some interest a few years ago, and who is now a prisoner, sentenced to remain one till death, because she, deserted and without resources, laid her child on the grass by the highway and left it, in the hope that some charitable passer-by would take it up and save it. Indeed, it might have gone hard, in our days, even with the mother of Moses, whom our law would have charged with exposing her child upon the water in order to get rid of it. Our law-makers would have seen in the one case the criminal act of a deserted mother, and in the other would have turned a sublime act of faith into evidence of intention to commit a deliberate and heartless act of desertion.

“And the angel of the Lord called to Hagar,”

and said to her, “What aileth thee, Hagar ? Fear not, for God hath heard the voice of the lad where he is.” Was it the voice of childish weeping only which God heard, or was it the voice of prayer ? It matters not ! “He hears the young ravens when they cry” in their hunger ; and their cry is inarticulate enough. He did not even wait for Hagar’s prayer. It is not said that she prayed. She only wept, wept aloud, and sobbed in the anguish of her soul, turning aside that she might not see the death struggles of her child.

“What aileth thee, Hagar ?” Oh, the tenderness of this question asked by God of a woman —a deserted woman ! If these words should meet the eyes of some sorrowing mother of an erring or ill-treated daughter, or of some seeker of souls in the vast mazes of Satan’s infernal machinery for tracking and holding those whose footsteps have once slipped, I beg them to read again this story, in the light of God’s presence,

and to take to their hearts the comfort it is meant by him, I believe, to bring to us women in these latter days ; for he knows our hearts are worn with sorrow in the contemplation of that world of woeful womanhood which the well-to-do, which even those who teach and preach in Christ's name, are still, in general, so content to leave where it is.

“Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him in thy hand ;”—so spoke the angel ; and at the same moment God opened Hagar's eyes, and she saw, close by, a well of water in the thirsty desert, which was life to her and to her son.

And so the God who had twice in these thirteen years spoken to her words of sweet and holy comfort, and twice granted to her just what she needed at the moment—guidance and sustenance—continued to support and to lead her ; and the wilderness which became their home was no longer a wilderness to them,

and Ishmael prospered, for God had given him his blessing.

Such is not, except in rare cases, the close of the career of Hagar's successors, the outcast women of the ages. Nevertheless, the record stands here for evermore of the undying pity and love of the Eternal Father for the myriads of those who, leaning on the stronger judgments of others, or trusting in human promises, have been brought into misfortune and misery, whose footsteps have slipped, and who have become the despised and rejected of men.

In the dawn of the new era, the Sarahs are beginning to repent and to stretch forth their hands to the Hagars, and to bridge over the gulf which has so long separated them ; and they will do so more and more ; and in the doing it they have, and will have to the end, the powers of hell against them, together with the solid, passive opposition of the egotism of a portion of mankind, and even of the Church of

Christ. But as they learn more and more of the truth, and of the mind of God in all these matters, less and less will their hearts fail them in regard to the end of all, though present seed sown may seem to yield scant harvest.

CHAPTER V.

THE GOD OF FAMILIES.

“I WILL be the God of all the families of Israel, and they shall be my people.” So it is written. But was it of the families of Israel alone of whom God thus spoke? The most impressive answer possible to this question is given to us in the record of a strangely wonderful event occurring on the eve of the entrance of the people of Israel into the Promised Land, after their long wandering in the wilderness. Joshua was now their leader. They were approaching the shores of the Jordan. We may imagine that every heart beat high with hope, with expectation, with wonder, not unmixed, perhaps, with fear on account of the power of the hostile inhabitants of Judea, whom they were to supplant. The inhabit-

ants of the land were idolators, ignorant of the true God. They were to be cast out, and this rich and beautiful country was to become the inheritance of the race chosen of God to be keepers and transmitters of his divine teachings and truth. But before the crossing of the Jordan, Joshua sent spies in advance to view the land, and especially to observe and report upon the great fortress and city of Jericho. The spies went forth, and the first dwelling they entered was that of the harlot Rahab ; and it was this Rahab who was elected of God to proclaim, by the object-lesson of her charity, her active faith and its results, the truth that God, the God of Israel, was, and is, also the God of all the families of the earth, of the families of every Gentile as well as Jew who should admit him into his heart and his home.

I need not recite the story, familiar to all, of Rahab's sheltering of this reconnoitring party sent by Joshua. That she recognized the

divine government, and the presence and favour of God granted to the invading people, is shown by her words to the spies :—“I know that the Lord hath given you the land” . . . “for we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt ;” and the close of her address to them is a confession of a faith which she alone, the harlot Rahab, appears to have possessed in that great city. Then, true woman as she was, though a sinful woman, she made her large-hearted request. She asked no personal gift in return for the kindness she had shown to the spies ; I do not know if she was a mother : poor soul, she may have been so ; but it is generally supposed that she, a woman of soiled life, had no closer relationships than those which she herself named in her comprehensive petition. She had at least the mother-heart, the yearning to gather around her, to shelter and to save all whom in any way she could call her own.

Having recognized the spies as messengers of God, she prayed :—“Swear unto me by the Lord, since I have showed you kindness, that ye will also show kindness unto my father’s house ; and that ye will save alive my father, and my mother, and my brethren, and my sisters, and all that they have, and deliver our lives from death ;” and the men sware unto her. Her prayer reached the heart of God, and his covenant mercy closed over all those of whom she had spoken. He inspired the messengers to reply to her, “Behold, when we come into the land, thou shalt bind this line of scarlet thread in the window, and thou shalt bring thy father, and thy mother, and thy brethren, and *all thy father’s household home unto thee.*” “Home unto thee ;” what a beautiful word ! A woman of an idolatrous tribe ; unlike the Lady of Shunem—she had no dignified position, no lofty character, no virtuous record. Yet her poor, ignoble house becomes, through her faith and

humility, a city of refuge, an ark of salvation, a true *home* for all her kindred. “Home *unto thee*.” Without *her* presence there, without her faith, and her gathering-in love, it would have been no home, no refuge from the storm which was about to break over the doomed city.

Jericho fell, and a general massacre followed. But Joshua had said unto the two men that had spied out the country, “Go into the harlot’s house and bring out thence the woman and *all that she hath*, as ye sware unto her.” It seems as if the sacred historian had purposed by repetition to emphasize the complete, the absolutely and minutely faithful carrying out of the promise made to her by God through the messengers ; as though he would count again and again all the relatives of Rahab, one by one, down to the most distant of her connections and belongings, in order to assure all who should read the record that not one was missing of all whom she had *brought home to herself*. For

again it is recorded, “And the young men went in and brought out Rahab, and her father, and her mother, and her brethren (sisters are included in the word brethren), and all that she had ;” and again it is repeated, “And they brought out *all her kindred*” (in the Hebrew, “families”). Probably among her brethren some had wives, with families of children, infants in arms, or aged parents. All, all were included in the asked, and promised, and fulfilled salvation.

Again there is a repetition, two verses further on : “And Joshua saved Rahab the harlot alive, and her father’s household, and all that she had ; and she dwelleth in Israel unto this day.” She had the honour of being ranked as an ancestress of the Messiah, for she became the wife of Salmon, who was the father of Boaz, the husband of Ruth the Moabitess ; and she obtained a place in the long honour-roll of the heroes of faith ; (Hebrews, xi., 31)—“By faith,

the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not."

And so, in the opening act of the long history of the conquest of Palestine by the children of Israel, this beautiful idyll of a rescued Gentile family is bound up in the wonderful and tragic story of the destruction of Jericho ; as if the great Father of all would teach his chosen and favoured people that, while they were the subjects of his special election, He, their God, was not alone the "God of all the families of Israel," but was also the God of families everywhere, in every land, and to the end of time ; and that in the family bond, ordained by him the love and the faith of one may draw and gather in many, bringing them all within the saving shelter of the home marked by the symbolic scarlet line.

Later in the world's history we have in the story of Cornelius, the centurion, another striking illustration of the truth that God is the God of

families, and a proof of his wide purpose of salvation towards all the nations and tribes of the earth. The Apostle Peter had not yet come to a full understanding of this widely embracing purpose of the Father of all, or he would scarcely have required that the vision which was to enlighten him on the subject should have been repeated three times in succession. Yet he knew the Hebrew Scriptures ; he had heard the wondrous story of the favour shown to Rahab and all her house, and he had witnessed the bestowal of the gifts of Pentecost on a host of persons drawn from all the then known nations, and speaking every language.

In obedience to the heavenly vision, he presented himself at the door of the Centurion's house, cautiously premising, however, "Ye know that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation ; but God hath showed me that I should not call any man common or unclean ;"

and at the close of this visit to the honourable Roman soldier and his family, we are told that they, the Jews, “as many as came with Peter, were *astonished*, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost.” These scruples and this astonishment of the apostle and his friends are a revelation of what seems to us in our days an extraordinary narrowness, a strangely placid contentment in the possession of exclusive privileges, and a too ready consent to the relegation of all who were outside those privileges to a state of eternal deprivation and loss. Such a state of mind is very far from the spirit of Christ. And yet, while thinking with indignation of the narrowness of the Jews, and of the fatal and enduring blindness of a vast proportion of that people to the light which had appeared to “lighten the Gentiles” as well as themselves, a question, a fear, sometimes arises in my mind, a chilling fear, as to whether we Christians, in our own day, may not be falling

into an error similar to that of the Jews. Is it possible that we, too, may be partially or wholly blind to the vastness of the salvation which God designed for earth's myriads when he sent his Son into the world, "not that he might condemn the world," but that "the world, through him, might be saved"? The contentment which I have heard some Christian people express with the spiritual light and security which is their own portion, while sharing in a great measure the Jewish spirit of exclusiveness and of narrowness of interpretation of God's loving purpose towards humanity, has sometimes filled me with a sad and dreadful fear lest we Christians should in our day be repeating the fatal error of the Jewish people. Highly orthodox were those Jews, firmly attached to their own traditions, and clinging to the Scriptural promises just so far as their own narrow and ungenerous spirit led them to interpret them as favourable to their own nation. "If thou hadst known in this day,"

said the Saviour, “the things that belong to thy peace !” But they did not know them, though they were the elect people. If we ourselves are even unconsciously blind in any degree to the fulness of the salvation of God, and his far-reaching, all-embracing tender mercies, may he open our eyes in time, and rid us of the loss and curse which, even in the midst of blessing, wait upon the narrow and exclusive orthodoxy of a privileged people ! Such people are in danger of imagining they have already arrived at “*all truth*,” and they eagerly build that truth round with a high wall of defence, so that expansion, to their view, becomes impossible, and the action of the Holy Spirit himself is, for them, restrained, of whom it was promised, “*He shall guide you into all truth*.” But “No,” say they, “we have been granted to know that ‘all truth,’ and we must guard it, and wall it round.” They dare not trust the truth to the care of God, the source of all truth, and they look with grave suspicion

on everyone who ventures to bring in within those walls of orthodoxy any contribution of a new thought which he believes has been given to him of God, while they drive away multitudes who cannot scale their high walls in order to enter in among them.

It was by coming into contact with the *true* worshippers of the true God among the Jews that Cornelius, the Roman, had attained to the measure of light which he had, before he sent for the apostle to teach him more of the truth, for which he was waiting with strong desire. When St. Peter reached his house, he found Cornelius waiting for him with “all his kinsmen and friends,” whom he called together. And as Peter talked with him, “he found *many* that were come together.” With what joy and confidence had Cornelius gathered together thus his whole family, “*his kinsmen, servants, and friends;*” for he had had a previous assurance of the blessing which was approaching ! He had

seen an angel in his house, which stood and said to him, “Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon” . . . “who shall tell these words, whereby thou and *all thy house* shall be saved.”

“And what did God say when he found that the faith of Cornelius had stretched the promise to such capacity? Did he rebuke him for his presumption, and chide him for a faith so grasping? Nay, the record runs, ‘While Peter yet spake, the Holy Ghost fell on *all* them which heard the word.’ To as many as Cornelius put into the promise, to so many did God respond in saving grace.”*

This thought of God of blessing for the family runs, like a golden thread, all through Scripture.

“Come thou, and *all thy house*, into the ark,” God said to Noah. It was not that righteous man alone, but all his family, whom God designed to save when the flood came upon the earth.

* E. Sisson. “God’s thought for the family.”

In the 11th of Hebrews it is said that “Noah prepared an ark to the saving of his house.”

When the angels of God came to Lot, in Sodom, to warn him to depart out of that doomed city, how tender was their solicitude that not one of Lot’s family should be involved in its destruction. “Hast thou any here besides?” they asked, “son-in-law, sons, daughters, and whatsoever thou hast in the city, bring them out of this place.” “And whilst he (Lot) still lingered,” these loving and eager messengers of God, more anxious for the salvation of Lot’s family than he was himself apparently, “laid hold upon his hand, and upon the hand of his wife, and upon the hand of his two daughters; the Lord being merciful unto him; and they brought him forth.”

John Bunyan, in the *Pilgrim’s Progress*, puts an expression of the same thought, the same care that not one of a family of one of God’s servants shall be forgotten, into the mouth

of the angel who stands at the wicket gate. Christiana and her children and her friend had knocked. The door was opened to them, and humbly and hesitatingly they entered, one only of the little ones lagging behind, unperceived even by the mother. The angel asks with tender solicitude, “But hath not Christiana *yet another son?*” and he is not content until that little loitering one is called and brought safely in.

On the eve of the departure out of Egypt of the Israelites, God ordained the Passover, saying to Moses, “Speak ye unto all the congregation of Israel, saying, they shall take to them every man a lamb, according to the house of their fathers, *a lamb for an house.*” This was the paschal lamb, the type of “Christ our Passover,” who was “slain for us.” God’s purpose was all along to bless the family of everyone who came in contact with him.

Mark the tenderness of God in the words

spoken to his people by the mouth of Moses in the last solemn appeal made to them by that great leader just before his death : “And it shall come to pass that . . . when thou shalt return unto the Lord thy God, and shalt obey his voice” . . . “that then the Lord thy God will turn thy captivity and have compassion on thee, and will return and gather thee from all the nations whither the Lord thy God hath scattered thee. *If any of thine be driven out unto the utmost parts of heaven, from thence will the Lord thy God gather thee, and from thence will he fetch thee.*”

In II. Samuel, vi., 11, 12, we read that the ark of the Lord, on the way to its own resting place, was brought into the house of Obed-edom, the Gittite, and that it remained there three months, “and the Lord blessed Obed-edom and *all his household.*”

“ Yet now hear, O Jacob, my servant, and Israel whom I have chosen ; thus saith the

Lord that made thee . . . I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground ; I will pour my spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring ;" * and again, "I will contend with him that contendeth with thee ; and I will *save thy children*."

In the 89th Psalm there are very consoling assurances for parents who see their children going astray, or swerving from the straight path for a time. God, speaking to David, or rather to the Son of David, the Messiah, typified by the King of Israel, says :—" I will make him my first-born, higher than the kings of the earth. My mercy will I keep for him for evermore, and my covenant shall stand fast with him." "If his children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments ; if they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments ; then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their

* Isaiah, xliv., 1, 2, 3.

iniquity with stripes. Nevertheless, my kindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail. My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips."

Zacchæus is an example of an honest believer to whom was granted the joy of salvation for his house. "Zacchæus, make haste and come down, for to-day I must abide at thy house ;" these words of Jesus, and those others, "This day is salvation come to this house," must have changed the whole of life for the man—a man looked down upon and shunned by the more respectable part of society because of his unpopular calling, which afforded opportunity, so often taken advantage of by his class, of defrauding the public. They complained that the Lord was "gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner." To this charge the Saviour readily assented. The accusation sat as a crown of glory on his divine head. "Yes," he replied,

“the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost ;” for “I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” He saves and blesses the families, not only of the just and righteous man, but those also of sinners—sinners even such as Rahab, who turn to him.

In his first great sermon after Pentecost, St. Peter proclaimed to listening thousands :—“The promise is to you, and to your children.”

Lydia of Thyatira, whose heart the Lord touched as she listened to the preaching of Paul, was baptized, with her *whole house*. It was to the Philippian jailor that that divine word, that welcome exhortation, was addressed, when he asked, “What must I do to be saved ?” “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, *and thy house* ;” and the same night he was baptized, “he and *all his* straight-way,” “and he rejoiced, believing in God, with all his house.”

In that tempestuous weather and heavy sea,

in which laboured the ship that bore towards Italy the apostle of the Gentiles, there stood by Paul, one night, the angel of God, who said :—“ Fear not, Paul, thou must be brought before Cæsar ; and lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee ;” and of all those two hundred and seventy-six persons who were in that ship, not one soul was lost. True, some were “ scarcely ” saved ; with difficulty saved ; it was for them *post naufragium tabula*. Those who could swim, did so ; “ and the rest, some on boards, and some on broken pieces of the ship, and so it came to pass that they all escaped safe to land.”

How far-reaching, how all-powerful is the saving virtue evermore flowing from Christ our Lord ! Some of those dear to us may seem far from the centre and source of blessing. They may seem to be saved only by clinging to a broken plank. It is not granted to all to draw so near as to wash the Saviour’s feet with their

tears, like the woman of the city, or to lean on his breast like the beloved disciple ; but, “if I may but touch the hem of his garment, I shall be whole.” “And when the men of that place had knowledge of him, they sent out into all that country round about, and brought unto him all that were diseased ; and besought him that they might only touch the hem of his garment ; and as many as touched were made *perfectly whole.*”

“HE DELIVERED HIM TO HIS MOTHER.”

In the long list contained in the 11th Chapter of Hebrews of the triumphs of faith, we have, in the summing up, the words, “Women received their dead raised to life again.” Women, not men, are mentioned especially here, in connection with this greatest of all wonders, the raising of the dead. And is there not a significance in the words, “Women received *their* dead ?” is it so worded because women,

mothers, are, by the force of maternal love, more completely identified with their dead than is the case in other relations of life ? The son or the daughter gone on before is still (so speaks the mother's heart) her own, her child. To her it is a link that can never be severed, except by the annihilation of her own spirit and being. The "women" here named, in every case except one, were mothers. That one case was that of the sisters of Lazarus. Those sisters were bound by strongest ties of love to their brother. After he had lain four days in the grave they spoke of him as "*our brother*"—eternally their brother, however far separated for a time. Poor Rizpeh claimed and held fast her dead sons as her own, long after they had suffered a cruel death and had seen corruption. Night and day she defied the wolves and the vultures to touch the poor decaying shells of her once living sons. It was told to David what Rizpeh had done ; no hint is given of the

impression made on David's mind, but I think it must have been a revelation to him.

When Elijah called back to life the son of the widow of Zarephath, he brought him down from the chamber and "delivered him to his mother," saying, "See ! thy son liveth."

Elisha spoke in the same manner to the Lady of Shunem. When her child was revived, the prophet said, "Call this Shunemite." So Gehazi called her, and when 'she was come to him, he said, "Take up thy son," and she bowed herself to the ground (worshipping) and took up her son.

On a certain day Jesus went with his disciples to a city called Nain. On the way he met a funeral procession, a weeping mother by the bier of her dead son. "*When he saw her, he had compassion on her.*" In infinite tenderness he did not wait for any request, any word spoken by her ; the sight of her sorrow was enough. Bidding her weep no more, he touched

the bier, and her son arose. “And he delivered him *to his mother.*” Yes ! to his mother only. He admitted the holy rights and claims of motherhood ; he had compassion on her tears ; he read her whole heart. Another, any other except Jesus, might have thought it a grateful act to present the resuscitated man to his fellow citizens, or to the elders of the synagogue in which he may have worshipped. Jesus alone knew perfectly the heart of woman, and how to reach the heart of all women, all mothers, by his exquisite humanity in thus delivering the son to *his mother.*

Again, when he, the Resurrection and the Life, was supplicated to enter the house of Jairus, where the little daughter lay dead, he suffered no one to enter that house with him except the three disciples chosen by him to be witnesses of this great act of love, and “the father and mother of the maiden ;” again it was a woman and a mother who “received her

dead raised to life again," and with her was associated in faith her husband, the father of her child.

Our Lord emphatically recorded for all ages his respect for the *father's* claim also. First, in the case of Jairus, as we have seen. Secondly, in that of the nobleman of Capernaum, whose son was sick and nigh unto death, and who went and sought Jesus in Galilee, beseeching him to come and heal his son. The Lord said, "Go thy way, thy son liveth." And "the man believed the word that Jesus had spoken unto him," and went his way and found it even as the Lord of Life had said. Life and health had returned to his son at the very hour of his interview with Jesus, in which he had claimed and accepted life for his child.

A third instance is that of the father of the poor demoniac boy. The cry of that father was a very bitter one. "I beseech thee to look upon my son, for he is mine only child." The child

was and had long been furiously tormented of the cruel spirit which had taken possession of him, filled with a suicidal mania, seeking death “oft-times” by casting himself into fire and water. And Jesus, it is written, rebuked the evil spirit, and healed the child, and “delivered him again to *his father*.”

“Oh, ye,
Earth’s tender and impassioned few,
Take courage to entrust your love
To Him so named, who guards above
Its ends and shall fulfil,
Breaking the narrow prayers that may
Befit your narrow hearts, away
In His broad, loving will.”

C H A P T E R V I .

EVERY GOOD AND EVERY PERFECT GIFT.

“EVERY good and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.” This announcement in the Epistle of St. James is prefaced by the words, “Do not err, my beloved brethren.” Those to whom he wrote had been drawn away by the error, into which so many fall, of charging evil upon God ; of imagining that he is the author and dispenser of every evil as well as of every good and perfect gift.

The true mother would much rather suffer herself than witness the suffering of her child. It is one of the sorest disciplines of life to be called upon to witness the trials, pains, or heart-

sorrows of our children, to stand by, with no power to help them or to remove the trial, and to have to learn to acquiesce in their sufferings, in the faith that this is a chastening permitted and over-ruled of God, in order to bring them nearer to him ; the fire which will separate the pure gold from the dross.

Few things more readily arouse the spirit of rebellion and resentment against God, however, in the heart of a mother who has not fully learned that *God is love*, than the contemplation of the suffering of her child, it may be a young and innocent child. This has been exemplified in the autobiography of a distinguished lady which has lately been given to the world. Her faith, she tells us, which had been wavering, was finally wrecked by the circumstance of the painful illness of her little child. The mother —she herself confesses—revolted against a God who “could so cruelly torture her innocent babe.” And well she might ! If God were the

author of those tortures, she did well to revolt, and finally to deny the existence of such a God. *There is no such god* ; and unconsciously that mother was defending the character of the God *who is* (but to whom she was as yet a stranger), in denying the existence of a cruel and torturing god.

The rock on which that mother's faith was wrecked, for the time, is one upon which many another has fallen and been broken. That rock is the error of acknowledging only one great Being and Power in the universe, and holding that one to be alone responsible for all—all the ruin, the misery, the pain, the evil that is in the world, as well as for the many “good and perfect gifts” which enrich human life. If there were but one active principle, but one will at work in the world, it would be no matter for wonder that many should be perplexed, scandalized, or despairing.

The chronicler of a noble work entitled “*A Colony of Mercy*,” writing of the home for

epileptics which was included in it, says :—“To popular perception, this disease—epilepsy—has always been the *morbus divus*, the punishment of the gods, for special sin.” Hippocrates differed. He said : “It appears to me divine in no other sense than any illness is divine.” “The *Christian knows*” (adds the author) “*that all illness is divine.*” I quote these words, not in order to argue the question with the author of that book (who very probably at another time sets forth the other side of the question), but merely because they express a belief, which has fastened itself firmly on the minds of many, Christians and others, that sickness and other evils are especially and directly of God.

I ask anyone holding that view to look carefully and impartially once more through the Gospels; to study again the history of the three years' public ministry of Christ on earth. He will see, in so doing, I think, that if there is one thing more marked than another in that history, it is

the way in which *disease fled before the face of Jesus, wherever he went.* Not only did he heal those who came to him and asked for healing, or for whose healing their friends interceded ; but he cured many who did not ask, or were unconscious of his power and will to release them from that bondage. It seemed that no sickness or disease of any kind could exist in his presence ; they fled at his mere approach like dark shadows before the rising sun. St. Mark tells us that on one occasion when Jesus landed on the shore, after passing over the Lake of Gennesaret, the people “ran through that whole region round about, and began to carry about in beds those that were sick where they heard he was ; and whithersoever he entered, *into villages, or cities, or country,* they laid the sick in the streets (the highways), and besought him that they might touch if it were but the border of his garment—and as many as touched were made whole.” And these acts of healing, unlike some

of his other miracles, were not events of rare occurrence, or reserved for special occasions, but they were of daily recurrence. Even as he walked along health prevailed where before was infirmity and disease. In pure compassion, and as if instinctively obeying a law of his being, he healed as he went.

If sickness is divine in its origin, and comes from God, how was it that Christ opposed himself to it? How came it that it melted away, as it were, in the atmosphere of his holy and wholesome presence and person? He told the Jews himself that a kingdom divided against itself cannot stand, and that Satan cannot cast out Satan. Can the Holy One (or will he) cast out, then, what is essentially good—what comes from God's hand, and originates in the Divine will?

Sin entered into the world, (and none dares to say that God is the author of sin), and death with sin; and with death entered everything

that pertains to death, that precedes, and that follows death—disease, violence, accident, decay, and corruption—and God is not the author of these hangers-on of death and the grave any more than he is the author of the original spiritual apostacy. It was not from the pure, loving, health-giving hand of Jesus that flowed the loathsome disease of leprosy and the horrible elephantiasis such as that which afflicted Job, nor any of those other ills of body, brain, and spirit which fled at his approach, and made haste to obey his “writ of ejectment.” Wherever tares are found growing among the wheat, it may be said “An enemy hath done this.”

Concerning the woman who was bowed down with a spirit of infirmity, Jesus said, “Ought not this woman . . . whom *Satan hath bound*, lo, these eighteen years, to be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day?” Whether, as some say, this woman had, or had not, given way to evil, and so become possessed by a malign spirit,

this possession resulting in bodily infirmity, the fact remains that her infirmity was one of the effects of sin, one of the works of the Evil one which Jesus “came to destroy ;” and, therefore, as he proclaimed, she ought to be healed.

But that God should *permit* evil seems to some minds as immoral as that he should himself create and dispense it.

This portion of the subject is surrounded with difficulty and mystery. It leads us back to the great unanswered question concerning the origin of evil. Nowhere would a dogmatic utterance of any kind be more out of place and presumptuous than here.

The glimpses of truth, the broken lights which we possess concerning the divine government of the world, come to us often as a succession of paradoxes, among which, however, the humble seeker finds at last the truth which satisfies the heart and fortifies the spirit, if it does not seem exactly to fit in with our poor logic.

God certainly suffers his children, even his highest saints, to fall now and again under the power of some of those evil things which we recognize as having been introduced into the world as the attendants of sin and death. He allows sickness to visit them. In the prolonging of such visitations, however, he is, I believe, sometimes only patiently waiting for the sufferer to claim deliverance ; and it is frequently a long time before his child recognizes the fact that he may glorify God by giving him the opportunity of rebuking his disease as much as he is doing by an unquestioning submission. “Wilt thou be made whole ?” is often his question to a sufferer, as to the cripple at the Pool of Siloam, as if he would say, “I am ready to rebuke the oppressor and to heal thee, when thou art ready to take this blessing.”

Those who are tempted to be angry with God for allowing misfortunes and evils to fall upon us, or who meet these in a spirit only of a

sullen acquiescence, have not yet fully realized that it is only through conflict, and through trial of our integrity, that we can become in the highest sense sons and daughters of God. Christ himself was “made perfect through suffering.”

There are persons who seem to think that God could, if he pleased, by a single act of his will, by a wave of his hand, cause all evil to cease out of the universe this very day, this very hour. Whether he *can* do so or not is beyond our power or province to know or to enquire. But it is evident to one who studies humbly his Word and his Providence in the light of his Spirit, that God has been pleased to submit himself for a season to a certain limitation of his power; and we may be sure that this is for an end that will be much more excellent and glorious than we can now conceive of, when the work of grace in the salvation of the world is fully accomplished.

“He *could not* there do many mighty works,

because of their unbelief." Here we have a clearly confessed limitation of his power, while, at the same time, the words point to that blessed truth and marvel of the appointed working together of God's will and man's will, the union of the divine and the human, for the fulfilment of his loving purposes, and the final triumph of good over evil. If the above words be true, that "*he could not*," is not the converse true also, that he could and that he *can* do many mighty works, because of the faith he finds in man? It would seem that God needs the faith of man as an allied spiritual agency, for the constant generating of the force by which he will finally "subdue all things unto himself," when the rebel power, the opposing will, will exist no more.

It is a wonderful and solemn thought that we, who believe in him, we fathers and mothers, who have the strongest of all human motives to exercise the faith which he loves and approves,

can supply to our God the conditions which he has told us he needs, and which he claims of us, in order to save not only our own children, but whole generations to come, who shall be fellow-workers with him in bringing in the reign of righteousness on the earth.

That fixed belief in the human heart, that God is the author of evil, which is the parent of so much sullen rebellion against our Father in Heaven, is also the source of many rash and unjust judgments of men by their fellow men. When the Jews came to Christ, and told him of the massacre of the Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices, they suggested that it may have been for some special guilt in those poor men that this judgment had been divinely appointed to fall upon them. Jesus reminded them of the eighteen on whom the tower of Siloam fell, affirming that in neither the one case nor the other were these victims “sinners above others. And in the

case of the man born blind, to whom he restored his sight, he replied, in answer to the question, “Who did sin, this man or his parents?” “Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents.” He further taught them that this calamity, which was *not* sent from God’s hand as a judgment on any special sins, should be made to redound to the glory of God. And so would all evils, all painful visitations, become occasions of manifesting God’s power and love, if the Son of Man could but “find faith on the earth.”

The same mental warp which attributes all evil and pain to God has tended also to create the revolt against the thought of the vicarious suffering of Christ. The death of Jesus, as an atonement for the sin of the world, must needs be distasteful, even horrible, to those who conceive that God drove forth his Son from paradise, that he slew him, putting him to an agonizing death, forcing the innocent to suffer for the guilty. But the

mystery of the Cross stands in a wholly different light when we comprehend, even a little, the law which governs the progress of victory over evil, by submission to that very evil in order to its destruction. It was by bearing the inevitable curse of man's sin that Christ overcame sin ; it was by dying that he overcame death. God himself must needs proceed by the way of this law. God himself must bow, to meet the evil, must shoulder its deadly weight, grasp it in its breadth, its length, its infinity, and thus, and only thus, conquer it. And if God is himself thus bound by the law of progress in victory and conquest, it becomes an act of supreme and wondrous love on his part, passing man's imagination, that, in order to fulfil this law, he should have taken on himself the human form he loves so well, come down to our earth, and so, as man, the Son of God bowed himself under the hideous curse, endured the mighty strain, and conquered evil by bearing it and all its ghastly effects.

This law of conquest by a voluntary submission to pain and penalty is illustrated all through history. We find it in the history of every vital reform, every holy revolution, every rising of men or nations against oppression or evil law. Victories have been won for righteousness by voluntary endurance of persecution, prison, torture, and death, by the just coming forward willingly to suffer for the unjust. This is the true position of the victor—to oppose evil by active effort, and to accept the full consequences and penalties of such opposition, even unto death.

And if men consider the choice of such a position noble in man, how is it that they cry out against God—our Emmanuel—because he himself became the supreme example of such nobility, voluntarily embracing to the full the curse and penalty of evil, in order that he might lead to the highest victory a countless host who shall not be scandalized at his wondrous act of

submission to the law by which his creatures are bound.

There are no means which the enemy of souls more constantly makes use of in order to mislead and distress man than that of instilling into his mind hard thoughts of God. And in this respect certain theological teachers have not been free from blame. They have delighted to describe God as of such a character as would be revolting to any honest soul, were it attributed to a human being; most justly do such teachers come under the condemnation pronounced by God on certain prophets and prophetesses—"Because with lies ye have made the heart of the righteous sad, and whom I have not made sad."*

A SABBATH REST FOR THE SOUL ON EARTH.

I make no apology for concluding these words which I have addressed to parents by

* Ezekiel, xiii. 22.

a few detached quotations, scattered over several years, from the diary of a mother, who after a long period of unrest in her earnest search after God and her heart labour for her children, was at last led into the position of greater strength and repose, which in the case of the Lady of Shunem followed her agony of suspense.

EXTRACTS.

“For many years I have suffered a severe secret discipline—gymnastics of the soul—too hard at times to bear. How I have longed, O Lord, to enter into peace, to have at last peace ! I know that I am accepted by thee, thy child, in Christ Jesus ; yet I am far from peace, on account of these great problems, these life-long questionings which are too dark and grievous for me. I can never solve them. I give up the attempt. O solve them for me, Lord, for thy own praise and glory ! The sorrows of humanity, like a succession of

turbulent waves, continue to flow over my soul ; and they touch me very nearly in the persons of those whom thou hast given me to love, to labour for, and to account for to thee. Work out this life-long problem for me, Lord. Thou canst reconcile the contradictions, oppositions and entanglements in it ; and in solving it, thou, who art the faithful and true, wilt answer the mother's prayers and comfort the mother's heart ; for thou, Lord Jesus, wast specially 'anointed,' to 'heal the broken-hearted.' "

" Through all the conflict, however, his Word has sustained me, and kept me from sinking, from day to day, from hour to hour. To-day the old, old familiar words came to me with great and new power, 'Come unto me all ye that labour.' I have gone through sore labour and travail of soul for years. I am, therefore, the person called to come. ' And I will refresh you'—' give you rest.' Rest ! *How* I know not, with such a burden on my heart of questioning,

and perplexity, and suspense, and only this silence of years answering to my constant longing. ‘Take my yoke upon you and learn of me ; for I am meek and lowly of heart ; and ye shall find rest unto your souls.’ For ‘my yoke is *easy*, and my burden *light*.’ I know by long and wearying experience that my own yoke is galling, and my burden heavy. His are the reverse ; there must be a transfer. I must put off my own and take his. *For* he is meek and lowly of heart. Lowliness and submission are, then, a condition of rest ; to bow, as Jesus bowed, to the Father’s will in all things—that is rest. Now, what is my Father’s will ? He wills no unkind, no hard thing. His will is ‘that good and perfect will of God.’ His will is a beautiful will ; it is ‘peace on earth and good will to men.’ He wills our salvation, the salvation of my ‘house,’ of my children, and my children’s children. And ‘this is the will of God, even your sanctification.’ He will take

great pains with their education and mine, and if need be he will be stern with us, in his tender love, that he may not fail in the perfecting of that education. His will works, through all pain and sorrow, to eternal joy."

Some years later.—“My eyes fell to-day on the words, ‘Thou shalt bear no burden on the Sabbath day.’ This period of my life, advancing towards old age, should be the Sabbath of my life’s experience, a haven, a time of rest. The command is (for it is more than an invitation), ‘*Thou shalt bear no burden.*’ And it agrees with the exhortation of the Lord Jesus, ‘Be ye not of doubtful mind’ (translated also, ‘be not in careful suspense’); and with the words of his apostle, ‘Be careful for nothing; but in *everything*, in prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, make your requests known unto God;’ for then (it is promised) ‘the peace of God which passeth understanding shall garrison

your heart and mind,' night and day, as an army garrisons a city."

"Since thou, Lord, hast given me assurance and the 'strong consolation' which thou hast ever in store for them who have fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before them, I pray thee to save me from narrowness in my sympathies and aims. Thou saidest to me in thy word long ago, 'O, thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted, behold, I will lay thy stones with fair colours . . . and all thy children shall be taught of the Lord, and great shall be the peace of thy children. In righteousness shalt thou be established; thou shalt be far from oppression, for thou shalt not fear; and from terror, for it shall not come nigh thee . . . no weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper.' And in this same address to the woman afflicted and tossed with tempest, thou enjoinest her to make place for more than her own children, a wide place for an

ever-widening circle in the home of her heart and within the reach of her labours. ‘Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thy habitations ; spare not, lengthen thy cords and strengthen thy stakes ; for thou shalt break forth on the right hand and on the left’’

“‘Ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.’ Yes, Lord, I know it ; and a sure reward is promised.

“What is the reward which I seek, which tens of thousands of God’s servants are seeking ? It has been the fashion of late, among the *Altruists*, to say that it is mean and selfish to cherish the hope of heaven as a motive of action. Those who speak so do not know what they say. It is one of those utterances which are not born of clear thought, though it may be sincerely spoken. The degree of meanness or of nobility in the hope of reward depends entirely on what is understood by ‘heaven’ and reward. Your

heaven may not be my heaven. The heaven of the Mussulman is not that of the Christian. The true disciple of Christ has no thought of a heaven of mere personal ease and enjoyment. What is the hope, the reward, which I strive for ? It is no personal reward ; not my own happiness ; no credit, no crown ; but my *heart cries out and longs for the world to be blest.* *This* is its coveted reward—to see the end of all its poor strivings—to see starved, strayed, and sorrowful humanity *in possession of its God, comforted, replenished, glorified.*

“ God, who knows the secrets of the heart, knows that no reward but this could be a reward to me ; and I know that he knows it, and takes note of it. And so all these promises of reward, of labour crowned, of a soul satisfied, are in truth to me nothing less than a promise of a future for the human race so beautiful and so blessed that no words can be found to express it. Where there exists the ardour of expectancy

of such a heaven as this, there can be no languor nor despondency, and no selfish desire of personal gain."

"I thank God that I long ago got far beyond being taunted with youth, and suspected of an enthusiasm which is a mere ardour of the blood, untried by experience of life. The sweet visions of my early youth, when I used to sit under the shade of the trees in my father's home and read of the holy martyrs and dream of a golden age, are nothing compared with the hope and enthusiasm which God gives me now, and which he has continued to give me while health failed, and some present hopes were blighted, and my way began to be strewn with the graves of those I loved, and I trod the lonely path of widowhood, and the world's worst evils continued to glare in my eyes. I have had sharp, deep wounds, and long conflict of soul; but *now*, ought not I, if anyone ought, to tell out the hopes which

God gives me, and to speak of the ever-widening horizon which I see illumined by his Redeeming Love ? ”

“ Return unto thy rest, O my soul ;
For the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee.”

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